



CHANCELLOR'S NOTES

Chancellor Rhee's regular newsletter on learning, schools and system-wide reforms in DC Public Schools

January 20, 2010

Working with Parents to Ensure a Strong Start to School

Early Stages Intervention Center: Competitive Service and Parent Satisfaction

All children deserve a strong start to school. But what if a child is delayed before school begins? It can be a heart-wrenching thing for a parent to see, knowing [how important the first few years of school will be to a child's later success.](#)

There are so many exciting milestones happening during this time that we may not even recognize a delay that could impact later development. For example, when should a child first see objects that are eight to 12 inches away? Learn to sit? Recognize familiar people? How do we know what should merit our worry and what we can ride out as a stage?

Early Stages: Assessment and Intervention for a Strong Start to School

[Early Stages is a new DCPS intervention center](#) that answers these questions and addresses delays before they become arduous uphill battles.

Opened to all DC children in the fall and celebrated in a grand opening last week, it identifies and evaluates 3- to 5-year-old children whose parents suspect learning delays.

For children with delays, its staff helps parents to find the school placements that can best meet students' needs.



Competitive with High Performing School Districts

This is one of the most exciting reforms to the system that we have seen in the past 2 ½ years. Our goal in everything we do is to be on par with the highest quality school districts in the country, and I am proud to say that Early Stages is providing that kind of service.

Housed in a state-of-the-art facility that includes a school, public library and technology center, Early Stages is staffed by dedicated educators, childcare experts, and special education professionals. Child Find field coordinators canvass the community to talk with local groups who work with children to identify those who may need services.

It used to be that families who wanted advocates had to hire them. Now, each entering family is assigned a family care coordinator who stays with them through the entire process—from hearing and vision screenings and meetings to determine eligibility for special education services, to school visits with families. They also coordinate interpreter services and can link families to other services such as Medicaid and food stamps.

Early Stages is also a terrific resource for parents who may not suspect a delay, but who want to learn more about the milestones that typically developing children reach at various stages. (Visit the Early Stages website).

Parents are Happy

We have been holding ourselves accountable to parents, and they are happy! Satisfaction surveys are tallied weekly, and parent satisfaction is at 98%.

A Parent's Story

A few years before Early Stages launched, Elizabeth Rihani and her husband brought their developmentally delayed daughter to be evaluated.

Unfortunately, they quickly became frustrated with the school placement process. Legal deadlines were missed and nobody helped them through the process. They felt let down.

“Parents received the message it was their fault their children were delayed,” Elizabeth said.



Like so many parents who know something is wrong but are not sure how to get help, it was a vulnerable and difficult place to be.

Elizabeth decided to do it herself. She educated herself about laws and processes. She visited schools, spoke with special education coordinators, and learned about Hana's needs and what it would take to meet them. She found a placement at Janney Elementary School, where she is thrilled with the attention and professionalism of the special education staff who work with Hana, who is now in kindergarten.

Elizabeth is now using what she learned to serve other parents as an Early Stages employee.

"I didn't have a full-time job because I was working with Hana for 4 ½ years," she said. "When I saw that she was being truly well-served at Janney, I wanted to be a part of the reincarnation I was seeing in early intervention at DCPS. I want all children in this city to get the kind of education and special education placement Hana is getting now."

Excerpts from parent satisfaction surveys show that Elizabeth is not alone in her excitement:

- "Great group of people [staff]. The city is very lucky to have all of them."
- "Staff very professional, and cared about my concerns. Very satisfied with the new program. Tried Child Find last year and was very frustrated with results. New program excellent so far."
- "The professionalism and concern that this staff has displayed – it was their 'team work' that was so impressive, along with their interest and concern for us clients. Thank you and God bless you all!"
- "The staff made my family feel important."
- "Excellent experience overall. Will recommend to others."

If you are a DC parent with a young child, we can serve you. Please visit the [Early Stages website](#) for more information.

Upping our Game

As a system we still have much of the marathon of improvement to run. But Early Stages is a DCPS service we can confidently say is competitive with suburban districts.

Combined with ongoing district-wide reforms, significant academic growth over the past few years and recent gains in high school graduation rates, we are becoming more competitive every year.

Suburban districts, look over your shoulders! Our staff and students are widening their strides. If we keep going at this pace, you will need to make room for us in the fast lane.

High School Fair

Parents of seventh and eighth graders, we hope you will bring your students to this [Saturday's High School Fair](#) (January 23, 2010). Every DCPS high school and career academy will be represented.

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To reply to this e-newsletter, send an email to Peggy O'Brien, Chief of Family & Public Engagement, at Peggy.O'Brien@dc.gov

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